

# Indiana House of Representatives

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## News and Information

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### **WELCH: NEW BOOSTER SEAT LAW TO PROTECT KIDS IN VEHICLES GOES INTO EFFECT JULY 1**

INDIANAPOLIS – On July 1, it will become safer for Hoosier children ages 4 through 7 to ride in motor vehicles, thanks to a new law authored by State Rep. Peggy Welch (D-Bloomington) that takes effect on that date.

The law will require children between 4 and 7 years of age to sit in booster seats and be restrained by lap and shoulder belts while riding in motor vehicles. Children between 8 and 15 years of age will be required to wear safety belts in all motor vehicles.

"This law is designed to protect children who have outgrown car seats, but are still too small to use seat belts designed for adults," Welch said. "It will help supplement existing laws that require children through age 3 to ride in safety seats that use a harness. Those regulations have done an excellent job of reducing injuries among infants and toddlers. With the new laws taking effect on July 1, we can do more to help children who are older.

"Studies have demonstrated that simply buckling our children into vehicles with seat belts is not enough to keep them safe," she continued. "If children cannot rest their lower backs against a seat while their knees are bent correctly over the front of a seat, they could sustain serious injuries if involved in an accident."

According to statistics from the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration, nearly 3,300 children ages 4 through 7 died in motor vehicle crashes across the country between 1994 and 2002. In Indiana, nearly 50 children between 4 and 7 are killed or seriously injured each year. Welch noted that, in the vast majority of those accidents, the children were either unrestrained or wearing seat belts designed for adults.

"Many parents are unaware that the usual seat belt system – consisting of lap and shoulder straps – does not fit children who weigh less than 80 pounds or are shorter than 4 feet 9 inches," Welch said. "Federally approved safety restraints can reduce the severity of an injury and reduce the rate of fatalities. Simply being correctly belted can reduce the harm our children face."

The new law will not cover some vehicles, including buses, taxis and vehicles that seat nine or more people that are owned or operated by religious or non-profit organizations.

Violators can be fined \$25, but that penalty may be waived if they prove a booster seat has been acquired within 30 days of the infraction. Any fines collected will be used to help purchase booster seats for families on lower incomes.

"Rather than penalize those who violate the law, I believe the initial response from law enforcement will be to continue to educate the public about the need to have these booster seats in their cars whenever they are transporting their children," Welch said.

Informing the public about the law was a primary reason why lawmakers delayed the effective date for the statute until this year, even though the Legislature passed the proposal in 2004.

"Our primary focus is to get parents to make the commitment to save the lives of their children," Welch said. "Restraint systems can cost as little as \$15, which is a small price to pay for a child's safety."